

AI

I confirm I used Generative AI to 'find current sources (Journal articles) between 2015 and 2025 regarding Observations. I can confirm I used Generative AI to 'summarise some articles to summarise the information'.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Section 1 - Welsh Curriculum for Non-Maintained Setting and Te Whāriki Curriculum.

The Welsh Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Settings (hereafter CfW, Welsh Government, 2024a) is designed by practitioners, for practitioners, to prepare children for the future, helping them to succeed in the world, ensuring they become ambitious learners, creative contributors, ethical citizens and healthy individuals. It outlines clear developmental goals to support children's growth for what children should achieve and ensuring they develop the skills and attitudes needed for lifelong success. In contrast, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government, 2017b) curriculum is centred around relationships and identity. Focusing on empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships, ensuring children learn through meaningful connections with people, places and cultures.

Whilst the CfW is non-mandatory for non-maintained settings, its four purposes of the curriculum are statutory, aiming to develop ambitious, ethical, healthy and creative learners. To meet these purposes, settings must make provision for learning across all areas incorporating every statement of what matters, including the development of cross-curricular skills (Welsh Government, 2024b).

Belonging and cultural

Both curricula emphasise a sense of belonging, though their expressions are shaped by distinct national contexts. CfW (Welsh Government, 2024a) is rooted in ‘Cynefin’ (a sense of place and belonging) celebrating local heritage and culture to foster identity. In contrast, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government, 2017b) is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, embraces biculturalism and multiculturalism, promoting a strong sense of self and inclusion of Māori perspectives alongside broader cultural values and a strong sense of self. This divergence highlights how curriculum design reflects national values. The CfW seeks to nurture Welsh culture, while Te Whāriki emphasises relational identity through the integration of Māori and diverse cultural perspectives.

Inclusion and equity

The CfW (Welsh Government, 2024b) places belonging as a core developmental pathway, recognising that a child’s sense of identity, inclusion and community is foundational to holistic development and learning. This focus extends beyond the pedagogy and into equity-driven practice, particularly through the Welsh Governments launch of Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning (DARPL, no date; Welsh Government, 2022a). Offering free, accessible training, DARPL supports practitioners in developing their confidence necessary to foster an inclusive, anti-bias environment.

Similarly, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government, 2017b) embeds cultural responsiveness and anti-bias principles at the core of its framework, grounded in the bicultural foundations. It celebrates the identities, languages and cultural backgrounds of all children and whanau, recognising that fostering a deep sense of belonging and cultural connectedness is fundamental to children’s learning and wellbeing.

Although the Welsh Government’s focus is on belonging and anti-racist education, Te Whāriki makes a commitment to biculturalism and kaupapa Maori principles. Collectively,

both curricula show the potential of early childhood education to act as powerful platforms for equity, identity and socially.

Implementation and the role of the practitioner

Both CfW and Te Whāriki recognise the importance of practitioner knowledge and flexibility in shaping meaningful learning experiences. CfW (Welsh Government, 2024a) offers flexibility within a clear framework, allowing practitioners to tailor learning to children's needs, between the ages of three and four. Similarly, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government, 2017b) empowers settings to 'weave' their own local curriculum, grounded in their community's language, culture and values, from birth to five. Both CfW and Te Whāriki recognise the importance of practitioner knowledge and flexibility in shaping meaningful learning experiences. CfW (Welsh Government, 2024a) offers a structured framework that allows practitioners to adapt learning to the specific needs of their children and setting. However, while this flexibility is a strength, Rawling (2020, cited in Robinson, 2022) highlights that settings in disadvantaged areas may face greater challenges in implementing the curriculum, increasing the risk of inequality. In contrast, the Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government, 2017b) curriculum empowers the Kiako (teacher) to weave a local curriculum as a philosophical principle grounded in cultural responsiveness, playing trust in practitioners while also prioritising equity. Suggesting without clear guidance and resources, the CfW could lead to gaps that could affect equality in learning, progress and opportunities.

Welsh Government (no date) developed 'Professional Learning' online modules to support practitioners in implementing the Curriculum for Wales within funded non-maintained nursery settings. The modules highlight the five developmental pathways, promote play-based pedagogy, provide guidance on schematic development, and emphasise strong leadership to ensure high-quality provision. Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government, 2017a) offers Matika Maranga webinars, that explore curriculum design, learning outcomes and bicultural practices aligned with its principles. Additionally, practitioners can access

downloadable workshops on topics such as leadership, assessment, oral language development and weaving the Te Whāriki with Tapasa to support culturally responsive practice.

Language

Linguistically, Te Whāriki adopts culturally rich and inclusive language, often integrating Māori terms such as whanau (family), mana (authority/spiritual power) and Kaiako (teacher). This linguistic approach reflects its commitment to cultural identity, connection and professional trust. In contrast, CfW uses more formal, technical language intended for practitioners, offering structured guidance to support consistent and developmentally appropriate practice.

The language used in curriculum documents shapes how expectations are interpreted by practitioners. Eisen (2018) and University of Colorado (no date) argue that the word “should” in policy makes messages unclear, as can imply something can be chosen, therefore, causing confusion about what is expected. The lack of clarity can undermine practitioners' confidence and consistency. Eisen (2020) expands on this, stating that “should” often sounds like a rule but functions as advice, making it difficult to determine compliance. He suggests that policies ought to reflect clear decisions, while recommendations belong in separate guidance documents. The CfW (2024a) uses “should” frequently (over 100 times), potentially blurring the direction between mandatory expectations and advisory guidance. Suggesting leaving room for inconsistent interpretations. In contrast, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Government 2017b) uses the term more sparingly (11 times), reflecting its principle based, bicultural approach that emphasises professional trust and clarity. This highlights the role of language in shaping both policy clarity and practitioner interpretation. Additionally, Libby O (2020) cautions against overly using rigid terms like “will”, “shall” and “must” in policy, as it can reduce flexibility. She suggests a balanced approach, of providing clear expectations without undermining practitioners or context. In this light, the CfW language is less prescriptive

and whilst promoting professional autonomy with freedom, it may not be as clear. In contrast the Te Whāriki curriculum is non-prescriptive, but through the woven mat of principles it offers clear expectations throughout.

The Te Whāriki curriculum places the Kaiako's as intentional and reflective practitioners who engage with children through observations, dialogue and partnerships with families, drawing on deep professional knowledge and values rooted in Te Ao Māori (New Zealand Government, 2017b). On the other hand, the CfW (Welsh Government, 20241) highlights the role of enabling adults as emotionally attuned, who nurture resilience and inclusion. However, the frequent use of "should" as in 'should have knowledge and understanding of child development' implies inconsistent levels of practitioner's confidence and effective knowledge.

Conclusion

Te Whāriki and the CfW both present ambitious, child-centred approaches to early years education, grounded in a shared commitment to nurturing the whole child, valuing cultural identity and trusting practitioners' expertise. However, they take distinctive paths. Te Whāriki offers a flexible, relational approach rooted in community and biculturalism while CfW provides a more structured framework to support consistency.

Curriculum language plays a role in shaping practitioner understanding and confidence. Te Whāriki uses culturally rich, inclusive language, embedding Maori terms that reflect its bicultural ethos and professional trust. In contrast Cf W adopts formal, technical language aimed at guiding practice, though its frequent use of "should" may blur expectations and lead to inconsistent implementation (Eisen, 2020; Robinson, 2022).

Both curricula emphasise the importance of the practitioner knowledge and flexibility in shaping learning. CfW supports tailored learning for children aged three to four, though concerns remain about equity in disadvantaged areas Rawling, 2020, cited in Robinson,

2022). Te Whāriki which spans birth to five, empowers kaiako to co-construct culturally rich, community based curricular. Both curricular are supported by professional learning.

Ultimately, both the CfW and Te Whāriki highlight the importance of early years in promoting equity, identity and inclusion. While the CfW focuses on belonging and anti-racist practice, through initiatives like DARPL. Te Whāriki embeds cultural responsiveness via its bicultural foundation and Kaupapa Maori values. Despite differing national contexts, both curricula share a common goal, to foster children's holistic development in socially, culturally, and nurturing environments from the start.

Section 2 - 'The Unique Child' and Assessment

Every child is a unique individual, shaped by their personal experiences, cultural background and specific abilities (McDowall-Clark, 2020). The Welsh Government (2023) adds the unique child is an individual, developing at their own pace.

Different cultures shape identity in distinctive ways. For example, British and American traditions, often highlight individuality and self-expression are highly valued, encouraging children to develop their own unique paths. In contrast, many other cultures place greater emphasis on family and community, viewing identity as something deeply connected to relationships rather than personal uniqueness. This influences how children are raised, nurtured, taught and guided (McDowall-Clark, 2020; Reekers and Waters-Davies, 2020). Te Whāriki (2024) emphasises that culture shapes every aspect of life, influencing how the world is seen, what is valued, and how individuals interact and engage with others. Te Whāriki offer learning stories, which are more meaningful, compared to traditional assessments (Learning Stories Help, no date).

‘Mā te ahurei o te tamaiti e ārahi i ā tātou mahi. (Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work) (New Zealand, 2017. pp, 63). Implies Learning stories place the child's voice at the

centre, capturing their thoughts, feelings and experiences as they happen. They help families engage with their child's learning journey in a personal, insightful way, offering an insight beyond the age and stage outcomes and reveals who their child is becoming. For educators, they encourage reflective practice, enabling a deeper, more responsive understanding of each child and supporting individual learning (New Zealand, ,2017).

Both the New Zealand (2017) learning stories framework and the Welsh Curriculum (2024b) for non-maintained nursery settings, promote formative, observational driven assessment centred on children's individual interest and developmental journeys. These frameworks view assessment as holistic, an embedded process rather than a checklist, emphasising the child as an active participant in their own learning.

However, while learning stories offer meaningful insights it is not without challenges, Knauf (2018, cited in Minson and Nuttall, 2022) found educators tended to focus on a narrow range of learning dispositions, such as 'taking an interest', 'communicating with' and 'taking responsibility' were documented. This suggests a tendency to highlight positive behaviours rather than using assessment to identify opportunities to scaffold learning. Wilson *et al.* (2023) further point out that in Wales, practitioners face time constraints that impact on their ability to observe and document learning effectively. This highlights the tension between aspirational goals of reflective assessment and the practical realities of day-to-day practice. In non-maintained settings this is particularly challenging as staff are not usually given paid non-contact time to complete observational records.

Wanoa and Johnston (2019) offers a way forward, highlighting the role of 'notice, recognise and respond' cycle in high-quality learning stories. This structure draws together observations, child and family input and forward planning to build truly responsive, collaborative narratives of learning.

The Curriculum for Wales Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Setting Assessment (Hereafter CfW, Welsh Government, 2023) emphasise the importance of initial assessments and taking time to understand each child's, background, culture, language and past experiences. According to EYAT (cited in Wilson *et al.*, 2023) state assessment guidance is clear and supportive, helping practitioners know what to observe, how to record it meaningfully and how to meet legal duties. It also ensures families are informed and children's next steps are well planned. This approach supports development holistically and that nurtures emotional wellbeing. This is a shared emphasis between Te Whāriki and the CfW that children's identities are deeply rooted in relationships, cultures and community. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which recognises the influence of interconnected systems on development (Perera, 2023). However, as Louis and Betteridge (2022) draws attention to unconscious bias, it can subtly influence how practitioners observe, assess and plan, especially when shaped by personal or cultural assumptions.

By fostering an environment where children's voices are truly heard, adults can start to acknowledge and address children as individuals; their backgrounds and needs. This also helps children develop an understanding of their rights and the importance of being valued and respected (Welsh Government, 2024a). This approach is shaped from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2019) Article 12, children have the right to be heard, Article 2, the right to no-discrimination and Article 23, the right to appropriate support.

Furthermore, Vaggers and Wilmot (2010) and Welsh Government (2024a) highlight that each child's individuality is closely linked to inclusion and ensuring all children receive individualised support that meets their needs not placed in marginalised groups.

McDowall-Clark (2020) agrees, emphasising the importance to valuing and respecting, ensuring that each child is seen, heard and nurtured in a way that honours who they truly are.

As Carter and Nutbrown (2013) suggests, assessment in early childhood is complex, varied and influenced by the dynamic ways young children grow, learn and express themselves. Within play-based curricula, assessment must be flexible, inclusive and attuned to context. Rather than a rigid measuring tool, it should be an embedded process that supports learning through natural interactions (Welsh Government, 2023). However, balancing inclusivity with consistency remains a challenge requiring thoughtful practitioner engagement to ensure meaningful assessment (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021a).

The Foundation Phase baseline assessment introduced in 2015, used age-related expectations and a numerical scoring system, to measure progress from reception to year 2 (Welsh Government, 2017). Emphasising on observations and formative assessments, it supported a holistic, developmentally appropriate curriculum (Welsh Government, 2014). The Foundation Phase Profile Handbook (Waters, 2016; Welsh Government, 2017) reinforced age-and-stage expectations, it did not fully account for cultural and individual differences in learning. In contrast, Welsh Government (2022b) promotes assessment as a continuous, everyday process, helping practitioners understand each child as an individual rather than relying on age-based judgments. This flexible approach priorities children's unique experiences and development over rigid expectations.

Building on this, the new assessment CfW (Welsh Government, 2023) embraces a holistic model, recognising the influence of identity, language and past experiences on learning. Introduced as part of this model are progression steps, providing a broad continuum of learning rather than a fixed age-related benchmark or expectations. Instead of prescribing what a child should achieve by a certain age, progression steps reflect on how learning develops and deepens over time (Welsh Government, 2024c). This aligns with the curriculum's emphasis on the unique child.

While these frameworks move away from prescriptive models, they rely on strong practitioner expertise to ensure assessments remain meaningful (Waters, 2016; Welsh Government, 2023). Waters (2016) emphasises the need for ongoing training, as the

flexibility can lead to inconsistent recognition of children's learning. Siraj-Blatchford *et al.* (2007) and Taylor, Rhys and Waldron (2015) highlighted within the Foundation Phase, with practitioners the quality of staffing mattered more than the ratio of staff, emphasising the importance of well-trained practitioners equipped to extend and support children.

However, the move towards a child-centred assessment is promising, its success is based on practitioners feeling confident and well-equipped (Central South Consortium, no date; Durden-Myers *et al.* 2023).

Observations lie at the heart of assessment in the CfW, aligning with the Froebel belief that it is fundamental to understand the holistic child, viewing observations as key to understanding the whole child, reinforcing the need to see learning in context (Froebel, 1967, cited in Louis, 2022). The curriculum relies on observation, formative assessment to ensure inclusivity and responsiveness to 'the unique child' (Welsh Government, 2023). Wiliam (2011, cited in Donaldson, 2015) argues that effective assessment can significantly accelerate learning, if embedded into practice This reinforces the importance of practitioner expertise in recognising and responding to each child's unique development as highlighted throughout the CfW (2023) and Te Whariki. However, as Wiliam (2011, cited in, Donaldson, 2015) suggests assessment for learning is easy to understand, but the real challenge is getting practitioners to apply and embed it throughout practice. In the CfW assessment for learning is no longer mentioned throughout and has been replaced with Assessment for Progress. Welsh Government (2024d) states assessment is at the core of the curriculum, aimed at supporting each individual learner's progress. This suggests that assessment should not assess only what has been learnt but assess what the next steps are. It should build on prior learning to moving learning forward, ensuring appropriate challenges are offered and individualised support dependant on the unique child (Welsh Government, 2024d).

Observations provide insight into children's growth allowing practitioners to plan experiences that nurture curiosity and confidence (Carter and Nutbrown, 2013; Welsh Government, 2023). Routine, in the moment observations provide a holistic view of development and inform tailored planning and support (Louis, 2022). Welsh Government (2024c) emphasise the importance of understanding child development, being the key factor of practitioners being able to recognise and respond to key learning moments. As Issac (1932, cited in Solly, 2018) observed, observations are vital for connecting with children's natural curiosity.

Conclusion

Recognising each child is a unique individual is fundamental to inclusive and effective assessment in early childhood (Welsh Curriculum, 2024c). Frameworks such as the Curriculum for Wales and Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings and Te Whariki, emphasise the importance of understanding the child holistically, through their relationships, culture, language and lived experiences. This approach reflects both Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, of interconnected environments and the children's rights-based focus on seeing each child as a unique and on their own journey. While play-based formative assessments offer rich opportunities to capture meaningful learning, its success depends on the training, confidence and time of the practitioners (Waters, 2016; Welsh Curriculum, 2024c). Therefore, indicating high quality observations and continuous reflection are essential to ensuring that assessment honours each child's journey, supporting their learning that is not only measurable, but deeply respectful of who they are and how they grow.

Section 3 – Blog

Transporting Schema: Supporting Play-Based Learning

Children have a natural desire to play, enhancing children's development (cognitive, physical and emotional), learning and enabling them to make sense of the world around them (Moyle, 2013; MacDonald, 2022). Athey (1990, cited in Canning and Rekers, 2022) states, schemas are a way to show through play a combination of thinking and exploring (Athey, 1990) are not new, dating back to Piaget (1970) with Athey (1990) One of the most observed schemas in early childhood education is the transporting schema, where children instinctively move objects from one place to another (Canning and Rekers, 2022; Gamble, 2024). Whether carrying items in bags, filling baskets and emptying buckets, or transporting materials around, this repetitive behaviour reveals important aspect of their learning processes (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021b; Welsh Government, 2024a).

"How does transporting relate to learning outcomes?" – The Enabling Adult

For professionals implementing a play-based curriculum, or transitioning to it, Else (2014) suggests, practitioners need to ensure the environment welcomes children as individuals, offering play and to freely express themselves (Else, 2014). Play should be spontaneous, not initiated or formed of structured groups or rigid systems; it does not emerge from mechanical process of children taking turns under an adult's predetermined perspective or expectation (Bottril, 2022).

Additionally, practitioners need to trust children's natural curiosity and value of their unpredictable play (Canning, 2012). Through observing play, practitioners will see how unique each child perceives objects creating their own affordance of the object (Gibson, 1979 cited in Casey and Robertson, 2019). Additionally, creating the affordance are often

loose parts (made up of natural materials or everyday objects) enabling children to link imaginatively and creatively providing opportunities for awe and wonder as well as sparking curiosity and exploration (Nicolson, 1971 cited in Casey and Robertson, 2019, MacDonald, 2022).

Welsh Government (2024a) emphasise the importance of schema behaviours, identifying how they may not make sense to adults, transporting objects may be irritating or frustrating for adults. Therefore, adults should be attuned to the children open to their ideas, and be responsive to their learning (Nut-brown, 2011, cited in Thomas, 2020). However, this can only take place, when adults understand schemas, being able to identify and know how to plan opportunities to support knowledge (Thomas, 2020).

"Transporting play looks messy or unstructured!" - The Enabling Environment

To implement a play-based curriculum, which supports transporting, the environment should offer children opportunities to move objects in different ways (Canning and Rekers, 2022; Gamble, 2024). For example,

- Carrying multiple items in baskets, pockets, or containers.
- Transferring objects from one side of the room to another.
- Filling and emptying bags or containers repeatedly.
- Collecting and distributing resource to different locations, inside and out. Yes, inside and out!

Transporting loose parts, allows children to enter the world of 'what if' developing skills such as problem solving, theoretical thinking, as well as creative thinking and imagination (Daly and Beloglovsky, 2023). Additionally, children feel heard within environments that enable them to be heard through their play from actively listening and acknowledging their

perspectivists and respond with care (Canning, 2012). However, sometimes, child's play may not be obvious to the practitioner and sometimes is misunderstood (Canning, 2012). Practitioners should interpret what is observed and consider what this could mean for each child (Welsh Government, 2023). Playing and learning through the transporting schema, children will learn to understand the differences between properties, linking to cross curricular learning through language and mathematical language as well as learning how objects can transform, change and adapt, by children being hands on, they are developing their scientific knowledge achieving problem-solving skills (Nottingham Education Network, 2024).

The affordance of loose parts for one little boy, by providing baskets, wheelbarrows, trolleys he was able to transport loose parts inside and out. The ability to gather, fill and transport items nurtured his thinking and problem-solving skills. For some practitioners observing this is frustrating and needs recognising as his schema and ensuring provision meets his need.

Boulton and Thomas (2022) state play in the outdoors offers freedom, and enables active movement compared to indoors. Their observations highlighted that children are naturally drawn to using loose parts in their play particularly outdoors. Thus, supporting their holistic growth, cognitive, creative and physical skills. Interactions with loose parts encourages more meaningful learning, developing skill building and deeper engagement.

“Parents may not see the educational value.” - Engaging and informing Parents.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) a child's development is profoundly influenced by the interactions between their immediate environments, not notably the microsystems of home and early years setting (Perera, 2023). The mesosystem

relationship between these environments strengthens especially when parents and practitioners engage in meaningful dialog.

For instance, parents may not recognise transporting behaviours as deep meaningful learning. Communicating its significance of such schema supports a shared understanding and reinforces the value of play-based learning at home. This aligns with Welsh Government (2024a) which emphasises the importance of building strong collaborative relationships with parents and carers, being able to support them. Working in collaboration is key to fostering children's learning and development, by engaging with parents within the setting. This enables parents to better understand and support their child to facilitate learning and progression (Welsh Government, 2024b).

Conclusion

The transporting schema is more than a repetitive behaviour; it represents an essential aspect of early learning and development. By recognising its significance within a play-based curriculum, practitioners can create environments and interactions that support children's natural curiosity while aligning with educational goals. Robinson (2010) argued that education systems should nurture curiosity, rather than stifle it. His perceptive aligns with Donaldson's (2015) vision for flexible experiential learning. Without genuine play, children do not learn; they merely mimic behaviours, conditioned into compliant beings, losing their individuality and sense of purpose (Bottril, 2022).

For those implementing curriculum change, integrating schemas ensures that learning remains child-led, meaningful, and reflective of children's innate ways of exploring their world (MacDonald, 2022). In doing so, educators empower children as active participants in their learning journey, one transported item at a time.

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